

## SUMMARY OF ANNUAL SENTENCING COMMISSION CONFERENCE

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At the National Association of Sentencing Commissions Annual Conference (NASC) in San Francisco, we discovered that the issues in our state are not any different than the issues in other states. Some states over the years have responded to difficult criminal and sentencing issues by creating a Sentencing Commission. Currently 23 states have an established Sentencing Commission, and many variations of Sentencing Commissions exist. Several states that have a Sentencing Commission have guidelines but some states do not have guidelines, and other states have guidelines that are voluntary. Some states with a Sentencing Commission have Parole Boards. Most states have very active Sentencing Commissions while others have Sentencing Commissions that rarely meet.

Sentencing Commissions usually have a strong research component with either a policy-making or advisory board. Commissions usually have a sophisticated data base of sentencing data and trends. The Commissions provide non partisan research for one or all three branches of government. Some Commissions serve as a conduit of statistical information while others are more involved in policy issues.

Sentencing Commissions are established by some states based upon sentencing fairness, equity, and certainty. These issues are usually indicated by:

- Racial, gender or geographic disparity in sentencing practices.
- Resource allocation issues within the justice system.
- Prison expansions or overcrowding.
- Crime rate changes.

The option to establish a sentencing commission is purely a policy issue. The NASC conference highlighted that Sentencing Commissions need to be non partisan with a well-defined mission, and need to have a strong research component. The question to ask when considering establishing a Sentencing Commission is where do you want discretion in the system.

Iowa has most, if not all, of the components of a Sentencing Commission, currently in existence. The Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning Division (CJJPD) houses the Justice Data Warehouse and serves as the State's Statistical Analysis Center. The LSA provides correctional and fiscal impacts on proposed legislation. There are also a variety of policy-making and advisory boards housed within the Executive and Judicial Branches.